John Bascom, Prophet

By

Sanford Robinson

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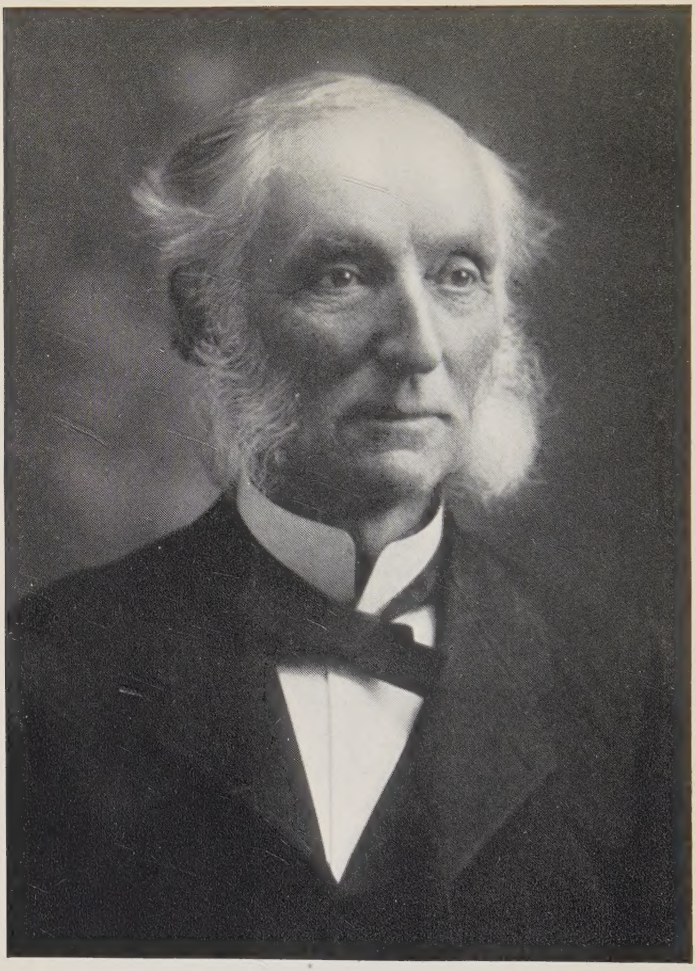
JOHN BASCOM
PROPHET



John Bascom

JOHN BASCOM
PROPHET

BY

SANFORD ROBINSON

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INTRODUCTION

THE annual meeting of the Alumni Association of Williams College held at Williamstown during the Commencement week of 1922, was devoted to the consideration of John Bascom's life and work. I was one of the speakers, and at the request of the association I have attempted to reproduce the substance of my remarks. The following pages are the result, though this presentation is necessarily somewhat expanded. The time limit of twenty-five minutes did not permit of the outline necessary to make a written presentation understandable. I have kept down the pages as much as possible, because of the lesson I have learned that the engrossed public like the court is more sympathetic towards short than towards extended written argument.

I have felt for several years that the world was ready for John Bascom. The point of view toward life has changed during my lifetime. When I began work the thing emphasized was success in the chosen calling, but now we have come to see that it does not so much concern us how great a success a man makes of his work unless he can also make a success of his personal life. This advanced outlook on life has reawakened in men a quickened interest in the nature of the spirit of the world and the relation of the individual to it. Society does not move forward at a regular pace or in one direction, and the accelerating movement taking place today is generally recognized. The war is often assigned as the cause, but the war is very much more a result than the cause of social changes. Prussianism stood in the way of progress and had to go. The widespread interest in religious belief today, and the progress being made toward a better statement of faith are indicated by the lament that is going up from some theologians,

whose hearts are encrusted beyond growth and who see in the regenerate spirit of men generally nothing but disaster.

The thing that has impressed me most in my contact with men is the universal desire for continued personal existence after death. The obstacles to a sure grasp of this faith almost always come from two sources. When the present generation of workers was in college, Idealistic Pantheism was the philosophic view generally accepted and taught, and even if a man did not go to college, his thought nevertheless was filled with this conception of how the world came into being, because the popular literature and discussion were absorbed with this idea. Under the pantheistic view there is no room for continued personality after the soul leaves the body, and the conception of immortality was dismissed as a notion which dreamers had created. The other obstacle to faith is the general distrust on the part of hard-headed workers towards the

churches, which only too often have been more interested in establishing the special dogmas of a particular denomination rather than the truth for which all churches must stand. When the general truth was presented it was often in a way that reason was compelled to reject and that made it also abhorrent to the feelings. Both of these objections have lost their force, and the problem is to bring this before the workers of today who feel that the question of immortality is answered in the negative and who have lost interest in the churches.

The logical difficulties, confronting the acceptance of a pantheistic view of how the world came into being, proved to be so insurmountable when critically examined in the light of all the facts and circumstances, that many philosophers have abandoned the view and now accept the world we know as a real world. Furthermore, the advanced preachers in all denominations now accept evolution. John Bascom, graduating from Williams College in 1849, spent the latter half of the nine-

teenth century and the first few years of this in daily reflection on these subjects, and forty years ago reached a thoroughly rational justification of faith that advanced thinkers in all branches of knowledge now accept. His life and his thought; the things he learned by living, are worthy of the most careful study.

He regarded nature as the very house of God, and after a luncheon in the woods tidied the spot as carefully as if in the drawing-room of a king. He knew all the flowers, birds and animals by name and nature, but he did not hunt or fish. He said he was not sure that he would gain as much pleasure in the killing as the animals would lose in having life thus prematurely cut off. He was never annoyed by the weather. Hot or cold, rain or shine, his greeting was always: Is not this a fine hot day? or a fine cold day? or whatever kind of a day it might be; for it was always a fine day to him. He was always just, and all men universally respected, admired and loved him. It has been my good fortune to come in close

contact with many fine men, particularly among the teachers of Harvard Law School and in connection with my work, but I have never met anyone who has impressed me with the success he was making of his personal life as did Dr. Bascom. He was in college shortly after my grandfather, and taught my father and taught me, and our home in North Adams was only five miles from Williamstown where he lived. His personality pervaded the entire community.

It may be presumptuous that I, a mere worker, should enter a field in which theologians and philosophers have been disputing since the time when Galileo and his contemporaries laid the foundations of modern science. My justification is that I knew Dr. Bascom personally and had an opportunity to observe his unique success of life, won against great odds, but which can be achieved by any who think his thoughts and who will to live a life consistent with them.

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JOHN BASCOM, PROPHET

I

THE world has outgrown orthodox theology; but it has not outgrown the need of belief in a living, personal God, in man's freedom on earth, and in his continued personal existence after death. Nations have always been able to endure disbelief by individuals and by groups of individuals, but no nation has been able to endure for long the discard of faith by the mass of the people. John Bascom is a leader among those who have given the world a new theology, a new statement of faith. He stood in the direct path to truth. Perhaps it is inaccurate to describe his position as standing because he was always on the march and moving in the right direction.

John Bascom was born in 1827 in Western New York. His father was a home missionary who died when he was but a year old, leaving a widow and four children. The family being in straitened circumstances, means for the boy's early education were found through the energy of an older sister, who in addition accomplished the education of herself and her sisters at a seminary in Troy, thus enabling them all ultimately to become teachers. Young Bascom was graduated from Williams College with the class of 1849. He came from a long line of New England Congregational ministers, and would have followed this calling naturally had his mother not attempted to force the issue. Having a temper which reacted sharply to undue urging, he decided to pursue the study of law. After reading law for one year he found it distasteful; and reverting to his earlier ideal went to Auburn Theological Seminary for twelve months, afterward to Andover Theological Seminary for one year, and later accepted a

call as tutor in rhetoric and elocution in Williams. He was tutor from 1852 to 1854, and professor of rhetoric from 1855 to 1874. A call to the presidency of the University of Wisconsin then came, and despairing of an opportunity to teach in Williams the subjects which engrossed him, and feeling the growing embarrassment to the college caused by his then advanced religious beliefs, he accepted this call to the West. His pronounced views in favor of prohibition were causing increased friction, and in 1887 he returned to live in Williamstown. In 1891 he again became connected with Williams, this time as professor of political science, which chair he held until 1903, when failing health and a desire to give more time to writing caused him to retire from active teaching. He died in 1911.

While Dr. Bascom was in college he had very serious trouble with his eyes, and for a period of seven or eight years after graduation he was forced to abandon reading and writing. Then slowly, through as many

years more, he regained the power of using his eyes for a few hours each day. During the later years of his life they rendered him all the service that his general nervous vigor would allow. Aside from this trouble Dr. Bascom had a sound physical constitution, but not a vigorous one. He was never able to generate as much nervous energy as his physical and intellectual activity demanded. He was constantly threatened with prostration of his entire nervous system or of some portion of it. Attacks of neuralgia, protracted pain at the base of his brain, rheumatism and sciatica developed from time to time when he overtaxed his nervous system. He always had absolute control of his physical appetites, and by a uniform temperance in eating, and careful outdoor exercise, he was able to perform a prodigious amount of work. A partial list of published addresses and other writings occupy seventeen pages of his book on *Things Learned by Living*. These would have been much more than a full life's work for most physically strong

men, even aside from teaching, to which Dr. Bascom also unsparingly devoted himself until he was seventy-four years old. Like every equally strong soul, he would have delighted in robust health, and he could have attained it readily had he been willing to some extent to sacrifice the work of giving the world a rational statement of faith which absorbed him so completely. Instead, however, of stopping work at the point where full health would have been preserved, he labored nearly every day, until he sank into positive and painful depression; and yet he was able to say that on most days he reached the region of "hilarious life."

Vigor is a quality essential to any working faith. Some men accept a pantheistic conception of God which makes impossible personal relations between man and his Maker, denies any actual human freedom, and substitutes for personal immortality the continuance of the race. Other men are able to divide their minds into separate water-tight compartments,

reserving one portion of their thought for religious and another portion for scientific ideas, which are mutually quite inconsistent; others are doubters; others deny God altogether; but the faith of the people must be both vigorous and understandable. John Bascom made faith continuous with knowledge. To appreciate his contribution to our intellectual and spiritual life it will be well to recall briefly the history of Western thought down to his time, and then consider his views and the development of thought to the present time.

II

The two great factors which have influenced intellectual life in Europe and America are the Hebrew religion and Greek philosophy. The medieval theologians of the Roman Catholic Church based their theology on the Hebrew religion and Greek philosophy. The orthodox theology underwent some modification by the Reformation and subsequent Protestantism, but at the time Dr. Bascom began his work it was unbroken in force and generally held possession of the hearts and minds of men. Under the old theology the world in its present wonderful form and everything in the world, including the hearts and minds of men, were the result of a single short effort of days. God, operating as an outside agent with materials which He fashioned out of nothing, built

the universe much as a mighty man of sufficient strength and power would have done. The love of God was subordinate to His glory, and a chief difficulty of the old theology lay in its attempt to secure peace and love in the hearts of men when there was but little understanding of the peace and love in the heart of God. It is commonly thought that the old theology failed because of conflict with increasing knowledge due to the development of science, but the failure is equally attributable to the growth of love in the hearts of men. Men, recognizing God as Love, have found it increasingly impossible to embrace doctrines involving the wrath of God and everlasting punishment.

Darwin published in 1859 his book on the *Origin of Species*, which his extreme followers developed into the doctrine of a mechanical evolution as a complete explanation of the present order in the world. Science was making rapid strides from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and was continually pre-

senting new discoveries that broke down the old beliefs. The announcement of the doctrine of evolution came at a time prepared to receive it. Yet in many communities almost universal doubt in all religious beliefs followed the original conception of evolution. The fatal blow to the old theology resulting from the acceptance of evolution engendered serious doubts in connection with all religious questions.

The predominant philosophy in the nineteenth century was Idealism. Materialism received a distinct impulse from Darwin's theory of evolution, but Materialism has never for any long period of time or to any marked extent, held the minds of men. The Greek philosopher, Democritus, conceived of the world as a chance union of atoms whirled about in space by blind force; and it has not increased the reasonableness of Materialism, as an explanation of the present order in the world, to change the method of union of atoms from a blind whirling movement to a blind

evolutionary movement. Then, too, Materialism as a metaphysical explanation of the universe always leaves consciousness as a remainder to be explained, for no one has successfully explained the creation of mind out of matter. Idealism offers many attractions to the thoughts of men, and beginning with Plato, it has had many brilliant defenders. Its weakness is that it makes this world a world of appearance only—a view directly contrary to all of our daily experiences. In order to be a consistent idealistic philosopher one has to divide sharply his philosophical thought from the practical thought of every day life. According to Idealism, the reality of the world is not in the things seen but exclusively in the perceiving mind. This presents a dilemma: either there are as many moons as there are separate pairs of eyes which perceive the moon, or all the eyes perceive through one mind only. A logical development of Idealism is Pantheism. When Idealism develops into Pantheism, the entire universe, including

man, is swallowed up in God. If the only reality is one universal spirit, our personality ends with death, and even earthly freedom is an appearance only; the appearance of freedom being due to the fact that our vision is too limited to allow us to see the absolute limitations necessarily imposed on our life by the universal life.

Such was the condition of thought at the time Dr. Bascom began his work. Science deals with the facts of the world. Philosophy also inquires as to what the world is, and, at times, asks the further questions, How it came into being and how it continues to exist. For, as Paulsen says, philosophy is the sum-total of all scientific knowledge as seen from an inclusive point of view. Religion seeks to determine why the world came into being and to disclose to us its spiritual destiny. Each has its own field and must be proved by itself, and yet each must be consistent with the other two. Life becomes an insoluble riddle unless each one of the three branches of thought

be consistent with the others. Instead of a unity of knowledge, we had at the beginning of the latter half of the nineteenth century a generally accepted scientific explanation of the world, in which the only reality was matter; a generally accepted philosophic explanation, in which the only reality was mind; and a generally accepted religious conception, in which both mind and matter were real. The scientific view attributed the order in the world to the operation of blind force; the philosophic view attributed the order in the world to the operation of an impersonal mind working according to set laws; the religious view attributed the order in the world to mind operating in a supernatural way, which from time to time set aside or superseded the natural order. Dr. Bascom unified knowledge, and made knowledge and faith continuous, by substituting a spiritual for a mechanical evolution, and by accepting a realistic philosophy by the terms of which the world was partly mind and partly matter, but in which

the unity of the world is preserved by regarding the development of the physical universe as the product of God's thought. Matter is everywhere permeated by Mind.

III

Dr. Bascom published a book in 1880, entitled *Natural Theology*, to controvert the materialistic view that natural forces and blind chance, operating through a mechanical evolution, are the cause of the present order in the world. In this book he pointed out that natural selection and adaptation are not sufficient to account for the origin of species. These may account for the preservation of species once they have originated, but blind chance and undirected force do not offer a reasonable basis of explanation for the origin of species. Adaptation, natural selection, heredity, correlation, use and disuse are offered by those holding a mechanical evolution as including the efficient forces by which the organic world passed from the most simple form to the most

complex life. The first two of these are not sufficient to explain the phenomena, and the last three, according to Dr. Bascom, cannot be claimed by evolution as belonging to it. Adaptation is defined as the direct action of physical forces on forms of life fitting them to their circumstances. The adjustment is not a peculiar property of the living thing but a mere response to external *stimuli*. However, it appears in fact that the tree supports its trunk with powerful roots in opposition to the winds rather than as a result of the winds. Furthermore, adaptation, when confined to the direct result of physical forces, offers explanations of but minor interest. Natural selection is a consideration of first importance but is not capable of accomplishing the results which have been attributed to it. It assumes a tendency in living things to vary slightly in every direction and attempts to explain how all of the plants and animals of the earth, including man, present themselves in their

orderly relations by the survival of the fittest. In reality it offers no adequate explanation of how it is that living things vary. It offers no reasons why changes should be in one direction rather than in another, or why the changes should be in the interest of life rather than adverse to life. Natural selection concededly explains many changes that have occurred in living things, particularly in cases where one form of life impinges upon another, and in cases of the disappearance of species. Natural selection explains how life continues, but does not explain how the seeds of life came into being. The world nowhere offers evidence of the abortions, the misfits and mistrials and failures with which the earth must have been literally filled if chance were the cause of order. Furthermore, natural selection with its tardy and hesitating movement cannot meet the requirements of the case. All the past years of life on earth, long as the period is, comprise too short a period for natural selection to have done the work

through constantly modified slight changes, without any limit as to the directions of the changes.

Inheritance is at once accepted by Dr. Bascom as a primary principle in the development of life, but he points out that it is a term which evolution cannot explain and which makes its first appearance among the powers of life. It is a distinct increment. Correlation also is a primary principle in the development of life. If the horns of an animal are strengthened, the shoulders, the muscles and the organs must also be modified to meet the changed conditions; but the change results because the constructive idea requires it. An alteration in any one part of a machine does not itself produce alterations of other parts. Other changes in the machine follow only as an intelligent mind orders the changes. Correlation is a law of the organic world but it is not included in matter and force and it does show design. The law of use and disuse cannot be claimed as its own by the physical

world. A glove is not thickened as the skin of the hand is by use. A pipe is not strengthened by pouring liquid through it, but our muscles are strengthened by labor. A machine does not absorb a part that is dropped out of it, but living bodies are constantly reducing or removing superfluous parts. What is the difference between the powers of living things and things in which life is not present? Mechanical evolution cannot answer the riddle, but if the presence of spiritual power be conceded the difficulty disappears. If evolution takes place along definite lines and with variable increments, all the casual forces are retained in activity and the continuous and symmetrical results are accounted for. Will, struggling from within and not accident operating from without, is the explanation of the origin of species. There is no mystery in the survival of that which is fit to survive. The mystery lies in the presence of life under such terms that it is able to triumph over its conditions. The views out-

lined above are accepted by many thinking men today, but they had been maturely arrived at and convincingly declared by Dr. Bascom in 1880.

IV

The conception of evolution has not only caused a very radical modification in all branches of thought—scientific, philosophical and religious—but it has itself undergone a revolutionary change in the comparatively short period since the doctrine has been regarded as established. It was believed to have started as a doctrine destructive of faith and now appears as a chief bulwark of faith. Darwin himself tended to an agnostic position on account of the inconsistency between the physical facts of the world and the old theology. Today the new theology reconciles the physical facts of the world with a supreme, pervasive, personal, spiritual presence, immanent in the world. Evolution as announced by Spencer is the development of

each successive stage of the universe and of our world as a part of it from the previous stage, by the operation of physical forces only. Thus everything is foreclosed from the beginning to the end. The forces of nature, effective at the dawn of time, determine everything. This was rejected by Dr. Bascom because it is an extreme statement not involved in the facts to be explained; because the origin of the successive changes is in no way accounted for; and because it makes no provision for the spiritual side of the world. He accepted a spiritual evolution. By that he meant one of distinct increments and of an overruling purpose which in its entire process contains and expresses personal spiritual power, in the means employed in the formation of the world as well as in the actual development of the world. The evolution of the universe is compared to the growth of a language or the development of an art. Physical forces throughout all time are permeated and carried forward by spiritual forces. The physical side and the

spiritual side are inseparable. The process by which the world has grown to be what it is is not a flow of blind physical forces. The spiritual evolution of the world runs parallel with its physical evolution. There is constant interaction between the spiritual and the physical, but the two do not merge into each other.

The scientific conception of the world, as Dr. Bascom points out, is that of a system of laws which sustain one another and completely cover all the phenomena of the world. The conception of a spiritual evolution concedes the validity of all the natural laws that science has discovered. The laws of nature are left full scope within their province but spontaneity takes its place with causation. Will asserts itself as life develops.

The conception of the world which evolution displaces is that of the creation of physical things possessed of their own qualities, and subject, like building material, to processes of construction which are wholly beyond the

material itself. This idea of creation was derived from man's own mechanical work. Evolution is directly opposed to this theory of the world. Under the conception of evolution the world is not so much a construction as it is a growth. The changes involved in creation have been continuous through all time. Each stage prepares the way for the next stage and passes into it.

This conception of evolution, as Dr. Bascom conclusively shows, not only makes religion, philosophy and science thoroughly consistent with each other, but it also clarifies each branch of thought. Our religious beliefs are comprehended much more firmly when it appears that they are a real part of the life of the world. Faith is an achievement. It must be grasped by each man for himself. To one who is determined to believe the opposite we cannot prove from the facts of the world that it came to be what it is through a God who is perfect in wisdom and love, and yet no one has ever presented a theory which, conceiving

that the world is the product of a spirit which is infinite, eternal and unchangeable, has regarded this infinite spirit as evil. Our conception of a spiritual evolution has led us to one supreme, pervasive, personal presence behind the physical world, and our instinct as well as our reason asserts that God is perfect in wisdom and love. A mechanical evolution eliminates spirit from the world entirely, but a spiritual evolution, by which the development of the world is postulated as the product of God's thought, leads us directly to God's nature as a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and then to His attributes as perfect in wisdom and love.

Dr. Bascom's conception of immortality follows necessarily from his conception of God. Whenever our conception of the mind of the world passes over from an impersonal spirit to a personal God, we must also immediately postulate immortality. The two doctrines—the existence of a personal God and the immortality of man—are inseparably related.

We cannot establish immortality without God, and without immortality a world which is the development of God's thought is unthinkable.

Dr. Bascom did not infer immortality from our physical constitution. This is strictly mortal, giving no promise beyond the present. Under a merely physical evolution he would abandon all idea of immortality. He inferred immortality from our own rational constitution in connection with the character of God. Science has nothing to say about the question one way or the other. The life of man when it terminates in death is not to be exhausted in its intellectual and spiritual resources; for man's higher powers are capable of indefinite growth. The whole object of evolution, the finished labor of life, would be lost without immortality. Nothing is more opposed to evolution than purposeless movement or an insufficient issue. Some try to save evolution while giving up the individual, by granting immortality to the race; but the race

is made up of individuals and if all individual life prematurely ends the increase of the race only increases the disaster. Immortality is held fast by the force of our spiritual powers. The universality of the belief in immortality in itself implies occasion for it. All general impulses in all forms of life imply exterior correlative facts. Finally the truthfulness of God calls for immortality. God would never have allowed this universal desire to absorb the thoughts of men unless the promise is to be fulfilled. The proof of immortality proceeds on the assumption that God is infinite in power, perfect in wisdom and love. We cannot reach a hopeful conclusion on any other premise, but with this assertion the conclusion necessarily follows.

Immortality, says Dr. Bascom, is the promise of faith, and liberty is the vision of faith. The two doctrines, Freedom and Immortality, are associated in the most intimate way. Without immortality, freedom would not have time to do its work and without

freedom everlasting life would be unendurably dull. Freedom is the indefinite power of doing; and all our hope and strength, all the impulses of our will and the forecasts of our reason, as well as the ever increasing satisfaction in the thing well done, conclusively urge upon us that freedom is the basic law of human conduct. The world must necessarily be to a large degree inflexible, in its function of storing our collective growth; but nevertheless, the changes that we are able to work in the world are considerable. We always have before us the fact that even animal life has triumphed over its conditions, and our superior powers will conquer the world again. We have time on our side. So far, we have been dealing with moments of time as compared with the ages which the world has behind it; but the future belongs to us just as much as it belongs to the world. In facing the past we rely on the future and in this way the past also becomes increasingly ours. If we continue to strive we shall find that the

advantage is not evenly divided between ourselves and the things that oppose us, but that the advantage is all with us. We are being incorporated into the universe and not only sharing but quickening its movement.

Belief in freedom is and always has been, as Dr. Bascom contends, an absolute necessity of life. Man cannot live in a world forever closed. Under the conception of God in the old theology it was impossible to reconcile the liberty of man with the liberty of God. The liberty of God was so far-reaching as to exclude the liberty of man. The old theology always stolidly asserted the doctrine of freedom; but at the same time it declared a theory which left no room for freedom. Under the old doctrine of decrees where God foreordained everything in the beginning, man was as much shut in by the will of God, as by the materialistic theory he was the sport of chance in a mechanical world. Fortunately the mass of men are not logical when logical conclusions interfere with necessary ideas. The doctrine

of a spiritual evolution helps us mightily to grasp the idea of liberty. With this hypothesis the element of time not only ceases to be troublesome but becomes a distinct aid. The world was not finally created in the beginning but is in an everlasting process of growth. Creation lasts as long as time itself. God has not already determined events but is now determining them. Man is both created and creator. A creature of God, he is free to work with God from this time forth.

This conception of evolution, asserts Dr. Bascom, puts an end to the separation between religious truth and other forms of truth. Religion cannot deal with its own assertions without thereby coming into relation with the teachings of science and philosophy. Consciousness does not afford a direct approach to God. God cannot be directly known to any man. The assertion of the possession of direct knowledge of God involves the assertion also of the possession of the power of God. Those who have claimed

to know God directly have no other revelation to make of Him than that with which we are all familiar. Guided by experience, we deny any superiority of power to know God in the "self-elected" over that of other men. The difference between saint and sinner is merely in the use and abuse of powers alike to all. This identity of endowment is asserted not in derogation but in exaltation of the power of man; for Dr. Bascom always insisted that men have intuitive as well as reflective powers. The physical facts of the world do not originate the apprehending power of man any more than his apprehending power originates these physical facts. Everything is open or closed according to our manner of approach. The Bible contains fundamental truths of life; but the philosophy and the science of the Bible are the philosophy and the science of its time, and the scientific and philosophical value of such views in the Bible is of no greater weight than the views of other writers on these subjects in Bible times. The en-

forced authority of the Church and the enforced authority of the Scriptures have served a most useful purpose in the past. They have contributed substantially to the present moral and intellectual development of the world; but the world is going forward, and the inner authority of reason and love is taking the place of external authority. The fallible minds of men are incapable of conceiving infallible beliefs. We have had no final statement of truth in any branch of knowledge. Faith will continue to purify itself. There is no faith without relative error and also no faith without relative truth. Our knowledge of God is not a fixed formula. God is known to us as a growing revelation rather than a perfected presence. Religion is dynamic, not static.

The miracles as historical facts are rejected by Dr. Bascom as not proved by sufficient evidence. The ability of God to interfere in the world is fully recognized, but that it should be necessary for him to set aside the

laws for the government of the world which he has established is questioned. However, in denying the miracles as adequately proved events, the fundamental principles of the spiritual world remain the same as they would be if the miracles had actually occurred. If God be powerless in the world, locked in by the laws of nature, then much more are we powerless; and *per contra*, if we have power God has infinitely more power. The miracles have presented to the minds of men the fact of a spiritual presence in the world. If in surrendering belief in miracles we also surrender belief in this spiritual presence, we suffer immeasurably. Men cannot win the world without confidence in the spiritual power in the world; but miracles cannot make good the position to which they have been assigned. The value of the miracles in the mind itself has given way. If we could repeat an unquestioned miracle as often as we chose, it could give no better proof of a supernatural presence in the world than do the facts of

man's power over nature which we are continually renewing at our pleasure. We all delight in moments of reflection to dwell upon man's victories over the world, and this takes the place of the need formerly filled by the miracles.

Conceiving God as perfect in wisdom and love, Dr. Bascom concludes that there can be no demand of justice superior to the demand of love. The doctrine of sin, with its doom of endless punishment, has assumed for hundreds of years such a forbidding form, that it is now wholly rejected by thoughtful minds. This dogma has played an important part in the development of the past. In addition to the authority adduced from the Scriptures, the very restraints in action which followed the preaching of the doctrine of future punishment was taken as evidence of its truth. The belief was linked with other beliefs which for a time seemed to make it reasonable. God was the ruler of the world and His glory was involved in all the claims of justice. The conception

of the love of God could not find its way into the hearts of men until the hearts of men were enlarged sufficiently to receive that love. Administration of the spiritual world was involved with the difficulties of the administration of human law. Sin was not measured from the mind and heart of the sinner but from the mind of God. The doctrine of everlasting punishment is explained by the fact that the punishment is so remote. The old theologians, confronted with a threat, fulfilment of which was not to occur within the bounds of this life, instinctively made up in violence what the threat lacked in directness. The punishment would not have been so terrible nor so long enduring had it been possible to locate effectively the threat nearer at hand.

The Kingdom of Heaven, to summarize Dr. Bascom, is a physical, intellectual, social and spiritual product, and our conception of evolution gives a rational promise of its fulfilment. No matter how many millenniums, convulsions or Days of the Lord the old the-

ology may promise itself, they do not come. Nevertheless the march of men is upward. We have framed an induction under the doctrine of evolution which is most comprehensive, and are justified in claiming its conclusions. Evolution is not pledged to make no mistakes and to occasion no delays. The idea involved is that a generative process will persist, until there results an advancement of most far-reaching and permanent consequence. The indications are that *physical* evolution is approaching an end with man. There will be wonderful refinements of detail in man's body but there is no indication of a new race of physical beings as much superior in physical qualities to man as man is superior to the next physical life below. However, evolution is not damming up the stream of progress or causing it to flow backward over areas already covered. Man is not only the end of all that has gone before but also the beginning of all that is to come. Man is from the earth upwards, but he is

also from the heaven downwards. Spiritual evolution and social evolution are just beginning. There is promise ahead of unlimited development in man's social life. In Roman times the highest ethical ideas existed contemporaneously with a depravity so great and so universal that the fall of Rome was the necessary outcome; but in our time high ideals have a practical effect upon society. Rome subjugated the intellectual Greeks to slavery, but in our time brothers went to war over the slavery of an inferior race. When we consent to think of the æons of time consumed in physical development, we are not able to think that social development is slow.

The inorganic world in its development has prepared the way for the organic world, and these two together are now leading up into the spiritual world. Man, the highest product of animal life, becomes the first term in spiritual life and, by means of society, grows into thoughts and actions that point to a Kingdom of Heaven.

Dr. Bascom's view of evolution and the modifications in religious beliefs that follow from it, which I have sought to summarize in the preceding pages, are admirably presented in his book entitled *Evolution and Religion*, published in 1897. This work gives a lofty, thoroughly rational view of man's destiny. His other principal books on religion are *Natural Theology*, already noted, *Philosophy of Religion*, published in 1876; *Words of Christ*, published in 1883; *The New Theology*, published in 1891; *God and His Goodness*, published in 1901, and *Things Learned by Living*, published by Miss Bascom after the author's death. This last book reviews the experiences of his spiritually eventful life and contains much of moment for right living. A chapter entitled "The Formula of Personal Life" is a presentation of the doctrine of freedom which in a most inspiring way resolves the conflict of life in favor of life.

V

Dr. Bascom made philosophic knowledge continuous with scientific knowledge and religious faith, by acceptance of the realistic view as an explanation of how the world comes to be what it is. During the period of his work, Realism was generally regarded as an exploded theory which one could not entertain and yet remain an intelligent thinker. Philosophy has always had a horror of dualism. Reflective thought demands a world at one with itself, and Monism has always been the goal. The scientists, engrossed in the explanation of things by a mechanical evolution, were confidently affirming that the physical world we know embraced the sum total of reality. Monism was arrived at by asserting that mind is the product of matter.

Matter has in it all the finer qualities of reason and of love. The Idealists reached Monism by asserting that the physical world we know is a world of appearance only. It is the form in which the spirit of the world appears to us; matter of itself has no reality whatever. Dr. Bascom reached Monism by postulating a unity of mind and matter. The processes of reason underlie all other processes. The development of the world is the product of God's thought. The world of experience necessarily opens with dualism, but becomes one product under reason. Matter is everywhere permeated by mind. Monism is reached by predicating a unity of the bodily and the spiritual.

It is interesting to note that the three modern explanations of the origin of the world were disclosed and rather definitely indicated by the Greeks. A superlatively intellectual people, their loose poetical religious beliefs exerted but little if any restraint upon their intellectual achievements. For the Greek gods were but little different in

their nature from men, and the ideas of the Greeks in regard to them did not interfere with the freedom of thought about this world of ours. Greek philosophy begins with Thales, who lived about 620 B.C., and reached its height with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Democritus, who was a contemporary of Socrates, conceived of the world as a purely material world made up of atoms. Plato introduced an ideal element into the world, the ideal and the material elements being at war. Aristotle conceived of the world as a spiritual and material unity. Philosophic thought of all intervening time comes back to and centres around some one of these explanations of Greek Philosophy. Each successive restatement tends to eliminate some of the errors and to enlarge some of the truths embodied in each. The scholastic philosophers, under the necessity of making their doctrine harmonious with religious faith, found the views of Aristotle adaptable. The intervening period between medieval and modern philosophy was occupied

by Descartes, who declared for a pronounced dualistic view by which the universe was theoretically split in two. The reaction from this impossible division between mind and matter announced by Descartes has thrown the world of thought since then into many untenable forms of Monism. The Dualism of Descartes leads to the Pantheism of Spinoza, according to which a stone rolling down hill and Shakespeare writing an immortal play, are processes identical in their nature. Kant and the Idealists who followed him attempted to present a theory of knowledge which is workable to meet the demands of every day life; but the idealistic view will not harmonize with experience. The Scottish school of philosophy held to the realistic view, which also received support in America, but generally the one thing which modern philosophers were united upon was in holding a withering contempt for scholasticism and anything in the nature of dualism.

Dr. Bascom recognized fully the funda-

mental truth of Idealism, namely, that the plane of our experience is mental and that material objects can never come directly within our experience. He also fully recognized the significant truth that Materialism had forced to light, namely, the reality of the material world. The difficulty of the Scotch realistic view, whereby material objects were regarded as directly handled and known, was that it failed to account for error and mistake. The scientific view of the world, the reflective view of the world, is a very different view of the world than that of naïve common sense. If we can directly know the world of objects, if objects get directly within the plane of our experience, then there is no room for error or mistake. The Scotch Realism cannot explain or in any way account for errors and mistakes that are every day occurring in everyone's experience. Dr. Bascom accepted Realism as the best explanation of how the world came to be what it is, but he did not accept it in the old form. He reconstructed

it and gave the name "Constructive Realism" to his system of philosophy. He agreed with the Idealists that the only thing which mind can know directly is mind, but he emphatically denied the assertion of the Idealists that because we cannot know the world directly we cannot know it at all. The limitations of direct knowledge are necessarily imposed upon man by man's nature, but man is furnished facilities for indirect knowledge which are adequate to man's needs and which science every day employs in its sphere. Reason uses both inductive and deductive processes. The access to knowledge is the same in philosophy as in science. Where Berkeley and Kant and the other Idealists concededly went wrong was in expecting of man a kind of knowledge which from the very nature of the case is impossible. Man is finite and because of the limitations of his nature he cannot know absolutely and beyond the shadow of doubt, except as to his own mind. The phenomena of the world, that is, the im-

pressions which objects make on us, are within the plane of our experience and are directly known, but the objects themselves are out of reach. However, because the objective world itself is never within the plane of our experience it is not therefore unknown and unknowable. The knowledge relation is a triple relation between the knowing subject, the object known, and the phenomenon caused by the object in the plane of the subject's experience. There is correspondence between the phenomenon and the object itself which human experience affirms to be actual. The world of objects is a real world which we never know directly but can know indirectly. We cannot have direct knowledge of, but we can have indirect knowledge about things. Science has always proceeded on this basis; and when philosophy generally does so, philosophy will become understandable to men in general.

It is interesting to note that Professor Pratt and six other leading professors of phil-

osophy and psychology in America, after having conducted a coöperative study of the knowledge problem for upwards of five years, in 1920 published a book called *Essays in Critical Realism*, of which each one of the professors wrote a chapter, wherein they present with great clearness and convincing force this view declared by Dr. Bascom forty years before. Apparently no thinker can retain his position as a thinker and wholly agree with anybody else; but there is much less difference between Dr. Bascom's view and the general treatment of the knowledge problem as presented in this book than there is difference of view between the individual chapters contributed by the different writers. There is one point where Dr. Bascom has a decided advantage over these younger philosophers, who never heard of his views in this respect and reached their conclusions independently, and that is in the name by which this new philosophy is called. "Constructive Realism" would be a more fit-

ting name than "Critical Realism." For the work of moulding Realism to fit the facts of experience is a constructive and not a critical work. The matter is referred to here, however, as disclosing the very forward position which Dr. Bascom occupied in the thought of his time. Living in a time when Realism was generally regarded as unthinkable, he had the ability to see its basic truth, the keenness to see the error which had made the old Realism impossible, and the reasoning power to correct the error. Nor is it to be forgotten that great courage and confidence as well as keen insight were required to take the position he took at that time.

Dr. Bascom was always interested in spiritual destiny, and he regarded philosophy as the key to the solution of the problem. Religious beliefs are not to be proved by the things of the seen world but from the experiences of the unseen world. Religious truths are not for this reason less certain than physical truths. However, religious faith equally with scientific

truth must be wholly consistent with reason. Faith must accord with knowledge. In reconstructing the old Realism, Dr. Bascom not only presented a theory of knowledge which is simple, direct and understandable, but he offered a conception of the origin of things which agrees with experience. The world we know is partly spiritual and partly material. Dr. Bascom accepted this world as we find it and reached a Monistic view by postulating a unity of the bodily and spiritual rather than by absorbing either one into the other.

Realism since the beginning of this century has received a rapidly increasing acceptance. A most clear and convincing statement of the realistic view of the metaphysical problem is presented by Professor McDougall of Harvard in the well-known book entitled *Body and Mind*, which is already in its fifth edition. Dr. Case, the learned author of the article on Metaphysics in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, devotes most of his discussion to an historical review of Idealism as the predomi-

nant philosophy of the past but points to Realism as the metaphysical view of the future. He sees that the world is a unity of mind and body, and ventures the statement that the philosophers must look in this direction if they are going to solve the problem of how the world came into being.

Dr. Bascom's first statement of "Constructive Realism" under that name appears in a book entitled *Science of Mind*, published in 1880. This book contains the substance of an earlier volume entitled *Principles of Psychology*, which the author rewrote for classroom work in connection with his teaching at the University of Wisconsin. This subject was of absorbing interest to Dr. Bascom, and received a restatement by him in a book entitled *Principles of Philosophy*, published in 1885, and later in another book entitled *An Historical Interpretation of Philosophy*, published in 1893. His last statement on the subject is contained in the chapter on religion in *Things Learned by Living*.

VI

It must appear from what has been said that Dr. Bascom stood nearly half a century ago where our most enlightened thinkers in science, philosophy and religion stand today, except that he covered the entire field of human thought, whereas most thinkers are content to confine their work to a single branch, whether it be science, philosophy or religion.

The point of view toward life has changed very greatly in this generation. When the workers of today were at school and about to emerge in the world of work, the thing emphasized was the importance of success in the chosen calling. The ideal was to rise in the world as rapidly as possible and as far as one was able. Now emphasis is put upon the other side of life. Several years ago

President Butler, in his annual opening address to the students and faculty of Columbia University, pointed out that the colleges generally were spending too much time in teaching men to earn a living—too little time in helping men to learn to live. The many can earn a livelihood; but it takes most men a lifetime, if they acquire it at all, to acquire the fine art of learning to live. President Ferry of Hamilton was quoted last spring in the newspapers as saying that the young men and women of the colleges of today, speaking generally, were interested in truth and service but that they could not achieve faith in a personal living God. Dr. Gordon, of Old South Church, Boston, who delivered the baccalaureate sermon at the Williams College Commencement in 1922, said that it makes no difference how successful a man may be in the calling he has selected for his work, if he cannot make a success of his personal life. The importance of *living* is attracting the thoughts of men today as never before. Most

men are keenly interested in religious questions, but the generally halting and timid movement of the churches has made men doubtful. The churches have never had the courage to see this application of the "Secret of Christ"; that men, in order to find faith, must first lose it. Dr. Bascom used to assert that the difficulties of life were never with the terms of life but always with life itself. The difficulties of life are in each man's spirit and not in the circumstances which surround him. To this thinker the purposes of education were to redeem life from life itself.

Dr. Bascom made significant sacrifices in the interest of liberty of thought. It required great moral and intellectual courage to dare to think and to speak as he did in his time. Like the prophets of old, John Bascom was a character of great grandeur who heard the voice of God in his heart and had the courage to declare his message long before the world was able to comprehend its force. Intellectual

solitude was his lot, and yet he had no solicitude, for he knew that he was in direct contact with truth. In the preface to *Things Learned by Living*, written toward the end of his life, and published, as stated above, after his death, Dr. Bascom is still sure that there are many truths which he brought to light of which the world is finding or will find the need, though he is by no means certain that these principles will be consciously derived from him. Yet this did not aggrieve him for he was wholly devoid of vanity.

As never before the world needs a vigorous, rational belief. This is not because the thoughts of men are on a lower plane than formerly. Society is advancing, and never more rapidly than today. It is because the world is on the march and not in camp that such a belief is needed to point the way; and because it is needed it will appear. This is a sure deduction from our doctrine of a spiritual evolution. The reputations of men have to wait for a correct appraisal of their lives; but

surely the world will come to see that John Bascom was one of the great succession of men called prophets who have stood on the heights and pointed the way in the everlasting struggle of mankind upward toward the truth.

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John Bascom, prophet

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